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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS PINR IZ
SUBJECT: HASHEMI: OLIVE BRANCH TO MALIKI TENTATIVELY
BEARING FRUIT

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi on April 17 met with the Ambassador and Special Assistant to the President Brett McGurk in Hashemi's temporary home on President Talabani's compound in Baghdad. The VP hailed the improved political climate since Prime Minister Maliki's Basrah operation, saying Tawafuq is moving closer to reentering the cabinet and that Maliki has allowed him a larger role in directing security operations in Mosul. Hashemi prescribed continued aggressive action against the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), and was politely skeptical of efforts to persuade Sadrists moderates to eschew violence. He also voiced frustration at Sahwat al-Iraq (SAI) leaders Ali Hatim and Hamid Hayis for their public vitriol against Hashemi's Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and at Iraq's Arab neighbors for refusing to engage Iraq diplomatically. End summary.

Upbeat on Tawafuq Return and Security in Mosul

¶2. (C) Hashemi confirmed he submitted names to Prime Minister Maliki for Tawafuq's return to the cabinet, and planned to meet with Maliki on April 18 to discuss further. He said "95 percent" of his proposal had been accepted, and that he is willing to accommodate any remaining objections from Maliki or his Shia allies. The Ambassador encouraged Hashemi to finalize Tawafuq's return as a strong message of cross-sectarian Iraqi unity to the Arab states, Iran, and the Iraqis alike. While the new political atmosphere is promising, the Ambassador said, this atmosphere could dissipate if it is not translated into tangible gains as soon as possible.

¶3. (C) Hashemi is pleased at Maliki's increasing focus on securing Mosul, but frustrated with incoherent command and control. He specified that Maliki and Army Chief of Staff Babakir Zebari both proclaim themselves in command of the operation, but neither has produced a coherent statement of battlefield objectives or how to achieve them. He also spoke to Nechirvan Barzani about a more judicious role for Kurdish troops in Mosul security operations, to prevent al-Qaida from playing on Sunni Arab fears of Kurdish encroachment. Hashemi suggested specifically that some Kurds may have to redeploy to restructure the currently Kurd-dominated 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army divisions, and said Barzani had responded positively. (Note: Nechirvan Barzani the same day told us his meeting with Hashemi had gone well, and that Kurdish troops will only provide information or manpower in Mosul if the GOI requests it.)

Down on Sadrists, SAI, and Arab Neighbors

¶4. (C) Hashemi advocated a hard line on the Sadrists, partly out of doubt that any significant part of the Sadrists Trend can be split from the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). He lauded

Maliki's rhetorical pledge to search every house in Sadr City, and the Ambassador's emphasis on securing Kadhimiyah as the geographic link between Sadr City and Shula. Hashemi said six Sadrist MPs early in the Basrah crisis had made vague offers to "cooperate" with Hashemi to end the crisis. Hashemi said he responded that the ball is in the Sadrist's court, a national consensus having emerged that JAM must disarm. The Vice President said he acknowledged to the Sadrist his differences with Maliki, but that no party may compete with the government's right to enforce the law and pledged to back Maliki until the last JAM fighter disarms.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador raised recent public feuding between the IIP and elements of SAI, encouraging Hashemi to keep such friction as private as possible. Hashemi thanked the Ambassador for his help in muffling Ali Hatim's and Hamid Hayis, most provocative statements, but complained that the GOI's willingness to host the outspoken SAI figures in Baghdad risked destabilizing Anbar to the GOI's own detriment. He claimed Ibrahim Jafari also had hosted the pair, and subsequently praised the JAM for bearing arms in a legitimate nationalist struggle against occupation.

¶16. (S) Hashemi complimented the Ambassador on his testimony before Congress, good-naturedly ribbing him for dubbing Iraq's security gains "fragile and reversible" and requesting a readout of his trip to Saudi Arabia. Visibly disappointed to hear that Saudi King Abdallah appears no more willing to engage in Iraq, Hashemi doubted the Egyptians or Emiratis would establish a diplomatic presence without the Saudis setting a precedent. He assessed that the Arabs are withholding recognition more out of bitterness at the U.S. than at Maliki.

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